

WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

1. A safety lighter comprising:

a housing defining a reservoir for containing fuel;

a valve movable between a closed position preventing release of fuel from the reservoir and an open position enabling release of fuel from the reservoir into a flame region of the lighter;

a pair of support arms carried by said housing;

a lever pivotally disposed between said support arms and having a thumbpress at one end and a valve-operating element at an opposite end for moving said valve between the valve-closed position and the valve-open position in response to pivoting said lever by pressing on the thumbpress;

a strike wheel and a pair of contact wheels carried by said arms for rotational movement by a user about an axis;

a flint carried by said housing for generating a spark upon rotation of the strike wheel relative to the flint and igniting fuel released upon opening the valve to produce a flame in the flame region; and

means overlying surfaces of the contact wheels on the flame region side of said axis and portions of the contact wheel surfaces on the opposite thumbpress side of said axis to expose less than one-half of the contact

wheel surfaces on the thumbpress side of the lever for engagement by the user's thumb.

2. A safety lighter according to Claim 1 wherein the strike wheel and flint engage one another along a straight line passing through the point of engagement therebetween and the axis, said overlying means extending beyond an intersection with said line toward the thumbpress side of the housing.

3. A safety lighter according to Claim 1 wherein the circumferential distance along the exposed contact wheel surfaces between a margin of said overlying means and the thumbpress is about one-third of the circumference of the contact wheels.

4. A safety lighter comprising:

a housing defining a reservoir for containing fuel;

a valve movable between a closed position preventing release of fuel from the reservoir and an open position enabling release of fuel from the reservoir into a flame region of the lighter;

a pair of support arms carried by said housing;

a lever pivotally disposed between said support arms and having a thumbpress at one end and a valve-operating element at an opposite end for moving said valve between the valve-closed position and the valve-open position in response to pivoting said lever by pressing on the thumbpress;

a strike wheel and a pair of contact wheels carried by said arms for rotational movement by a user about an axis;

a flint carried by said housing for generating a spark upon rotation of the strike wheel relative to the flint and igniting fuel released upon opening the valve to produce a flame in the flame region; and

a windscreen partially enveloping the flame region and having an opening in a top wall thereof for receiving and exposing the flame, said top wall extending from said windscreen past the axis of rotation of the contact and strike wheels to overlie a majority of the surfaces of the contact wheels and expose less than one-half of the contact wheel surfaces on the thumbpress side of the lever for engagement by the user's thumb.

5. A safety lighter according to Claim 4 wherein said windscreen has a pair of side walls extending past the support arms along opposite sides of the lighter.

6. A safety lighter according to Claim 4 wherein the strike wheel and flint engage one another along a straight line passing through the point of engagement therebetween and the axis, the top wall of the windscreen extending beyond an intersection with said line toward the thumbpress side of the housing.

7. A safety lighter according to Claim 6 wherein said top wall inclines upwardly from a position overlying the flame region to a position overlying the majority of the circumference of the contact wheel surface.

8. A safety lighter according to Claim 4 wherein the circumferential distance along the exposed contact wheel surfaces between a margin of the top wall of the windscreen overlying the contact and strike wheels and the thumbpress is about one-third of the circumference of the contact wheels.

9. A safety lighter according to Claim 8 wherein said windscreen has a pair of side walls extending past the support arms along opposite sides of the lighter, the strike wheel and flint engaging one another along a straight line passing through the point of engagement therebetween and the axis, the top wall of the windscreen extending beyond an intersection with said line toward the thumbpress side of the housing, said top wall inclining upwardly from a position overlying the flame region to a position overlying the majority of the circumference of the contact wheel surfaces.

10. A safety lighter comprising:

a housing defining a reservoir for containing fuel;

a valve movable between a closed position preventing release of fuel from the reservoir and an open position enabling release of fuel from the reservoir into a flame region of the lighter;

a support carried by said housing;

a lever pivotally carried by said support and having a thumbpress at one end and a valve-operating element at an opposite end for moving said valve between the

valve-closed position and the valve-open position in response to pivoting said lever by pressing on the thumbpress;

a strike wheel and at least one contact wheel carried by said support for rotational movement by a user about an axis;

a flint carried by said housing for generating a spark upon rotation of the strike wheel relative to the flint and igniting fuel released upon moving the valve to the valve-open position to produce a flame in the flame region; and

a windscreen partially enveloping the flame region and having an opening in a top wall thereof for receiving and exposing the flame, said top wall extending from said windscreen past the axis of rotation of the contact and strike wheels to overlie a majority of the surface of the contact wheel and expose less than one-half of the contact wheel surface on the thumbpress side of the lever for engagement by the user's thumb.

11. A safety lighter according to Claim 10 wherein said windscreen has a pair of side walls extending past the support along opposite sides of the lighter.

12. A safety lighter according to Claim 10 wherein the strike wheel and flint engage one another along a straight line passing through the point of engagement therebetween and the axis, the top wall of the windscreen extending beyond an intersection with said line toward the thumbpress side of the housing.

13. A safety lighter according to Claim 12 wherein said top wall inclines upwardly from a position overlying the flame region to a position overlying the majority of the circumference of the contact wheel surface.